

which are vital to ensuring continued health insurance coverage for all American families who want it, while also providing a fair and open marketplace that provides a strong, healthy, competitive market. This, in turn, will bring affordable, efficient health insurance with innovative products that will actually help to control the cost of care. That is what the GOP alternative, while still far from perfect, is seeking to do. One thing we do know is that the end result will be better than ObamaCare.

As a father and a grandfather, I understand how important it is to have access to affordable healthcare. No one should be priced out of healthcare coverage for one's family. But our current system is simply not working. After 7 years of ObamaCare, the American people are dealing with higher healthcare premiums, fewer options, more taxes, and reduced access to care. Health providers are struggling with more bureaucracy, with more time spent filling out paperwork instead of caring for patients, and being frustrated by ObamaCare's crippling new regulations.

As I have said from time to time, ObamaCare is a rapidly sinking ship, and there is simply no hope for a recovery. On its seventh anniversary, it is hurting more people than it is helping, and it must be repealed and replaced before it totally crumbles under its own weight.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to comment on the nomination of Mr. Friedman to be the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. Shortly, we will be having that vote.

I consider the U.S.-Israel relationship to be a strategic anchor for the United States in the Middle East and one of our most important relationships with any country. Since the creation of the State of Israel, support for this relationship has been bipartisan, bicameral, and supported by successive U.S. administrations. This bilateral relationship is also sustained by the deep bonds of friendship between the people of our two countries. This relationship has benefited Israel and has benefited the United States.

Given the range of strategic challenges across the globe that our country faces and the unprecedented instability and violence embroiled in the Middle East today, it is critical that we take steps to unify support for the U.S.-Israel relationship across the political spectrum. Thus, I believe it is vital that the U.S. Ambassador to Israel be seen as a unifying figure in this enduring relationship.

I really do believe that there is broad understanding and support in the Senate and the House for the special relationship between the United States and Israel—Israel, the only true democracy

in the Middle East, a country that we can rely on for important intelligence information and that has an economy which is similar to ours. It is a country that has enjoyed a special relationship with the United States since 1948, when Harry Truman recognized Israel after the historic vote at the United Nations.

Following extensive consideration of Mr. Friedman's record and taking into account his statements during his nomination hearing, I have concluded that his past record would make it very difficult for him to serve as that unifying force. For that reason, I am unable to support his nomination as America's top diplomat in Israel.

I appreciate Mr. Friedman's efforts before the committee to express regret for his substantial record of divisive, inflammatory, and offensive statements. Unfortunately, I believe the body of Mr. Friedman's published works, not to mention his public statements, will compromise his effectiveness in representing the United States and all Americans, as well as the Government of Israel and all Israelis.

Taken together, Mr. Friedman's statements and affiliations make it clear that he does not believe a two-state solution is necessary for a just and lasting peace. I am concerned that Mr. Friedman's history on this issue, in which he calls the two-state solution a scam, will undermine his ability to represent the United States as a credible facilitator of the peace process. There is simply no realistic, sustainable prospect for lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians other than as two states, living side by side, with security.

I thank Chairman CORKER for the manner in which this nomination was handled before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I think we had ample opportunity, and I thank Chairman CORKER for that, but I do urge my colleagues to reject this nominee.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate, notwithstanding the previous order, move to the rollcall vote now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Friedman nomination?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 96 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Cochran	Inhofe	Scott
Collins	Johnson	Shelby
Corker	Kennedy	Strange
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Manchin	Tillis
Cruz	McCaïn	Toomey
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Menendez	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Murkowski	

NAYS—46

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Peters
Bennet	Harris	Reed
Blumenthal	Hassan	Sanders
Booker	Heinrich	Schatz
Brown	Heitkamp	Schumer
Cantwell	Hirono	Shaheen
Cardin	Kaine	Stabenow
Carper	King	Tester
Casey	Klobuchar	Udall
Coons	Leahy	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Markey	Warner
Donnelly	McCaskill	Warren
Duckworth	Merkley	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murphy	Wyden
Feinstein	Murray	
Franken	Nelson	

NOT VOTING—2

Isakson Paul

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

PROTOCOL TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY OF 1949 ON THE ACCESSION OF MONTENEGRO

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 1, treaty document No. 114-12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The treaty will be stated.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Treaty document No. 114-12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the Treaties Calendar No. 1, treaty document No. 114-12, Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the Accession of Montenegro.

Mitch McConnell, Cory Gardner, Steve Daines, John Barrasso, Joni Ernst, Bob Corker, John Cornyn, Lindsey Graham, Jeff Flake, James M. Inhofe, Roy Blunt, David Perdue, John McCain, Pat Roberts, Tom Cotton, Jerry Moran, Mike Rounds.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, for the information of Senators, we will have the cloture vote on this treaty on Monday night at 5:30 p.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

(The remarks of Mr. MARKEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 708 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). The Senator from Connecticut.

AMERICAN HEALTH CARE ACT

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, at this hour, we still don't know what the House of Representatives is going to do. They are amending and changing and modifying the reform of one-sixth of America's economy under the cover of darkness, trying to secure the votes necessary to fulfill a political promise. We await their decision as to how much havoc they wreak.

I wanted to come down to the floor today to address for a moment the exceptional process that is occurring right now, as we speak, in the House of Representatives and to talk about one of the reported changes they are considering before sending the product over to the Senate.

Just to review for a minute, Speaker RYAN likes to talk about his approach to healthcare as a three-pronged approach. Well, the Congressional Budget Office, headed by a gentleman hand-picked by the Republican House conference, agrees that it is a three-pronged approach; they just have a little bit different interpretation of those three prongs.

First, they say higher costs—15 to 20 percent spikes in premiums for everybody right off the bat and then dramatically higher costs, especially for older people, sicker people, and poorer people. If you are young and if you are relatively affluent and healthy, you may make out a little bit better under this proposal, but if you are not in that category, you are going to pay a lot higher costs and get less care.

This is the headline from the CBO report: 24 million people lose health cov-

erage. That is catastrophic. That is the total population of 17 U.S. States. We just kick them off health insurance without anywhere to go other than our emergency rooms.

Remember, all of this is in order to finance a giant tax cut for the rich. I had a chart up here yesterday that showed that in this bill, if you make zero to \$200,000, you get no tax cut, but if you make over \$200,000, you get a nice, healthy tax cut. It could be up to \$7 million on average for some of the wealthiest taxpayers. So there will be higher costs for everybody, except for maybe a very small slice of the population, but with less care. I mean, it is a nightmare when it comes to the number of people who lose care under this bill, all in order to finance tax cuts for the wealthy.

That is the background on what TrumpCare is and what the American Health Care Act is. People hate it. I mean, people hate it. There is a new poll out by Quinnipiac University that shows stunning numbers. The approval numbers for this bill are under 20 percent.

Republicans kicked the living you know what out of the Affordable Care Act, and they never got its approval ratings down to under 20 percent, as has happened to the American Health Care Act in its third week of existence. That is pretty impressive, for 18 percent of Americans to approve of a bill that has only been out there for a few weeks. And it is not because they don't know anything about it; over 50 percent of Americans don't like it, 18 percent support it, and 56 percent don't support it. Across demographic groups, across age groups, everybody hates this thing because they get it. They are not dumb. They know that this is taking healthcare from them and passing along higher costs to them in order to finance a tax cut for the rich. It is pretty simple. People really didn't need a lot of time to understand it.

Republicans in the House know that as this thing hangs out there, it is getting less popular. It is hard to get less popular than 18 percent. Those are tough numbers to do worse than. The reason Republicans are racing this bill through the process is because they know how deeply unpopular it is because they know it is a scam. They know it is essentially just taking healthcare from Americans and forcing them to pay more in order to finance a tax cut for the rich.

What is happening today in the House is they are blowing up their rules in order to push a bill through that no one will have looked at. It is possible that they are going to file a gigantic reform to the entire American healthcare system and then call a vote on it within hours. Come on.

In 2009 and 2010, Republicans were blistering critics of Democrats, who they said were forcing the Affordable Care Act through the process too quickly. But in 2009 and 2010, the House held 79 bipartisan hearings and mark-

ups on the health reform bill over the period of an entire year. House Members spent nearly 100 hours in hearings, heard from 181 witnesses from both sides of the aisle, considered 239 amendments, and accepted 121 amendments.

This bill was introduced 2 weeks ago. The first time the American public ever looked at it was 2 weeks ago, and the House is rushing it through today. Two weeks. Fourteen days. Twenty days. Not a year. Not 79 hearings. Not 100 hours of hearings. And we are talking about bringing it up before the Senate for a vote next week, with 20 hours of debate on a reordering of one-sixth of the American economy.

It is really extraordinary how this bill is getting jammed through the process because Republicans know that every day it hangs out there, more people figure out what it is—a massive transfer of wealth from regular, ordinary Americans, through less care and higher costs, to the very rich and also insurance companies and drug companies, which get a big tax cut.

On today's modification of the bill, the talk today is that in order to make the bill a little bit meaner and a little bit crueler, the House is going to remove from the underlying law the requirement that insurance companies cover a basic set of what are called essential benefits. This change is being demanded by the very, very conservative wing of the House Republican conference. They call themselves the Freedom Caucus. This is a group of sort of the most radical Members in the House of Representatives. They are demanding that these essential healthcare benefits be stripped out of the law in order to get their votes.

Let's talk about what these essential healthcare benefits are. Basically the law now says that if you are offering an insurance plan and you want to call it health insurance, then you have to actually offer to cover healthcare. So the essential healthcare benefits—what every plan today has to offer in order to be able to call itself insurance in this country—are ambulatory patient care, which means outpatient care, emergency care, hospitalizations; pregnancy, maternity, and newborn care; mental health and substance abuse care; prescription drugs; rehabilitation if you get injured; lab services; tests; chronic disease management—management for diabetes or heart and liver conditions; and pediatric services, services for kids. That is it. Those are the essential healthcare benefits.

Frankly, if you are buying a health insurance plan, wouldn't you expect that it would cover your emergency care if you were to go to an emergency room? If you are buying healthcare in this country, what good is it if it doesn't cover a hospitalization when you get very sick? If you are buying an insurance plan in this country, don't you think it is going to cover your kids when they need basic pediatric services?

So what is happening now is something different from healthcare reform in the House of Representatives. What is happening now is a radical rethink of what healthcare insurance is. If all of a sudden health insurers don't need to cover the cost of your hospitalizations, don't need to cover mental illness at all, don't need to cover addiction coverage at all, then is it really insurance any longer? If it is not covering that list of things, what is it covering?

CBO has an answer for this. CBO says that if there is an insurance plan that doesn't cover this list of benefits, they won't count it as insurance. So when they are giving you the numbers of people who will have insurance or not have insurance after this bill, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office says: We don't really count it as insurance if it doesn't cover basic stuff, such as hospitalizations, outpatient services, prescription drugs, and pediatric services.

So what is happening now in the House of Representatives is really a radical rethink of healthcare insurance. Under the law they are contemplating passing, healthcare insurance wouldn't need to cover anything. You could buy an insurance plan, pay your premium, and then be told that it doesn't cover your kid when he gets diagnosed with schizophrenia, that it doesn't cover your daughter when she gets in an accident and has to go to the emergency room, that it doesn't cover your spouse when they get really sick and are hospitalized for 3 days. What kind of coverage would that be any longer if it didn't cover that list of things?

Let's be honest. This would be a massive transfer of cost to individuals. The No. 1 prong of TrumpCare is higher costs. If insurance companies don't need to cover any of these things anymore but you still have to buy them, then it is just a massive shift of costs to individuals because, remember, TrumpCare penalizes you if you don't buy insurance.

The Affordable Care Act did the same thing, admittedly. The Affordable Care Act said: If you don't buy insurance, you are going to pay a penalty. But that is why the Affordable Care Act said that insurance has to really be insurance. It has to cover stuff because if we are going to require you to buy it or we are going to penalize you if you don't buy it, then insurance should really be insurance.

Well, TrumpCare penalizes you if you don't buy insurance. You would pay a massive penalty. For a lot of people, the penalty could be \$5,000 if they don't buy insurance. But now the change they are considering in the House of Representatives means the insurance product you will be forced to buy won't cover diddly.

By the way, when your insurance company doesn't cover it and you have to pick up the cost, it is going to cost you way more money. Everybody has probably seen a bill from a hospital.

Let's say you had to go in and get a colonoscopy. You get your bill, and you always sort of scratch your head because you see two numbers—you see the number the hospital bills and then you see the number your insurance company pays. Often, the number the insurance company pays is like one-third of what that hospital billed. Why is that? It is because the insurance company is negotiating with the hospital on behalf of thousands of patients, so they get that price way, way down. The insurance company only pays a fraction of the cost that is billed. If you don't have insurance coverage for it, if all of a sudden it is not a benefit in your plan because the American Health Care Act told insurance companies they didn't have to cover a hospitalization, then you will pay that higher price. You don't get the insurance company discount. You will pay that higher number. That is going to bankrupt people.

The families in my State, when their child gets hooked on heroin, they are going to find a way to pay for that care so that their child doesn't become another statistic, another one of the 900 who died in my State last year from overdoses. They are going to do everything possible to get that child care for that addiction. They will mortgage their house, they will sell their house, they will drain their savings account, they will sell off every possession they have to make sure their child does not die from an overdose and so that child gets the care they need. If their insurance company won't cover it, then they will do everything necessary to cover it, and you will have a rapid increase in the number of people whose lives are ruined, who go bankrupt because of their medical costs—something that doesn't happen right now because the Affordable Care Act gives you real subsidies to afford care. It gives you real help to be able to buy insurance, and it requires that insurance companies actually provide you with insurance.

This is an extraordinary thing that is happening in the U.S. House of Representatives right now. Nobody likes this bill. Healthcare experts think it is a joke. The American public has roundly rejected it. It is getting meaner and crueler every day in order to round up the votes necessary to get it passed. Why? Because this bill is not about solving any problem in the healthcare system. It doesn't solve a single problem. Again, except for this narrow group of younger, healthier, affluent people whose premiums will be a little bit less, everybody else is worse off. It only solves one problem, a political problem—the promise that the Republicans made to repeal the Affordable Care Act. But they didn't spend any time thinking about how to actually do it. So they are stuck now with an awful bill that nobody likes, that doesn't solve a single problem, and that is getting meaner and meaner every single day.

It was bad enough, and now this bill is frankly getting into some really rad-

ical territory—talking about totally rethinking insurance and letting insurance companies offer you a product that covers nothing and then it requires you to buy it. Think about that. We are going to require you to buy insurance, but the insurance isn't going to cover anything. TrumpCare, the American Health Care Act—whatever you want to call it—has three prongs: higher costs, less care, and tax cuts for the rich.

We will have an opportunity here in the Senate to get this right. As to the House of Representatives, I don't know if they are going to pass this. I don't know if it is going to fall apart. But we will have a chance to get this right. Republicans and Democrats coming together, we can admit together that there are still a lot of things that are wrong in our healthcare system.

In the Affordable Care Act, there are some good parts of it, but other parts need improvement. We can come together and decide to tackle this problem—the high drug costs, whatever it may be—together and reject this partisan, rushed approach in the House of Representatives. It does nothing except give us higher costs and less care in order to finance tax cuts for the wealthy.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the deep and growing concerns about Russia's interference in the United States' 2016 Presidential election and the implications of Russia's broader malign activities for our national security.

On Monday, we learned from FBI Director Comey that there is an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election and whether associates of then-candidate and now-President Donald Trump were communicating with Moscow. It is absolutely essential that Congress and the American people get clear and comprehensive answers on, first, what happened; second, what are Russia's strategic goals and intentions for further interference in democratic processes here and in Europe; and third, what we need to do to counter this threat going forward. That is why I have repeatedly called for an independent, transparent, special counsel to investigate the legal aspects of Russian efforts to influence our election and a bipartisan select committee within the Senate to look at all aspects of Russia's destabilizing activities here and around the world.

I am concerned that the politicization of the issue of Russia's

interference in our elections and its hostile actions against Western institutions and values is diverting our attention from what otherwise should be recognized as a clear and potent threat to America's security. We need to focus on what is critical: Russia is attacking American democracy as part of an even broader assault on our cornerstone NATO alliance and the post-Cold War international order.

The threat posed by Russia's actions is not merely "fake news," as serious as that phenomenon may be, but a very real, very strategic threat to U.S. interests. Russia is testing America and the transatlantic community across multiple fronts.

Today, I will highlight just how broad and fundamental this threat from Russia really is.

What should be clear to everyone is that last year Russia engaged in a systematic and strategic effort to influence the U.S. Presidential election. While we do not know all the details of Russia's involvement, we know that in January the U.S. intelligence community—including the CIA, the FBI, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, or the ODNI—issued its assessment that Russia engaged in bold and unprecedented efforts to influence and undermine trust in the U.S. Presidential election.

Among the January intelligence report's findings were the following: first, that President Putin, in their words, "ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. presidential election."

The intelligence community also found that "Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency."

The report further found that Russia's influence campaign was multifaceted and included covert intelligence operations such as cyber espionage against U.S. political organizations like the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee. It combined the release of hacked information with overt propaganda efforts through Russian government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media actors, or, as they are referred to, trolls.

Another key finding was that Russia's influence efforts in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election reflect—in the words of the intelligence community—"a significant escalation" compared to previous information operations.

The intelligence community also warned that these Russian activities, including "cyber-enabled disclosure operations" likely represent a "New Normal" in Russian conduct toward the United States and our allies and partners.

The intelligence community further assessed that Russia will use the lessons learned from the 2016 U.S. Presidential election to influence future

elections in the United States and overseas. We do not have to look very far for evidence supporting this conclusion.

Russia is alleged to have targeted an April 2016 referendum in the Netherlands on a partnership agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly rejected by Dutch voters. This year, Russia is openly intervening in France's Presidential election to be held in April. For example, Russia has loaned tens of millions of dollars to the far-right National Front Party in France, whose leader, Marine Le Pen, has defended Russia's annexation of Crimea and criticized international sanctions against Russia.

Germany, which holds parliamentary elections in September, has also been targeted by Russian hackers and trolls—straight out of the Kremlin playbook we saw used here last year. Russia is attempting to steadily erode the integrity and western orientation of multiple Eastern European countries through a variety of state and state-controlled or state-influenced activities. These coordinated and focused Russian operations threaten to undermine the European cohesion which underpins the post-Cold War international order. This pattern of Russian interference will only intensify with time if it goes unchallenged.

Russia's malign activities also threaten our core security relationships with our transatlantic allies and partners. The NATO alliance has been the bedrock of our security relationship with our European allies. Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, countries in Central and Eastern Europe have aspired to integrate more closely with the West, whether militarily through NATO membership or economically within the European Union, or both. But President Putin rejects the post-Cold War international order and seeks to reestablish a Russian sphere of influence over his immediate neighbors by weakening democracy, collective security, and economic cooperation across the region.

In pursuit of this strategic goal, Putin has demonstrated a willingness to use all tools at his disposal, including cyber hacking, disinformation, propaganda, economic leverage, corruption, and even military force, to violate the sovereignty of Russia's neighbors and undermine support for their further integration into Europe.

Since 2008, in neighboring Georgia, Russia has occupied two regions and recognized their independence, which the international community widely condemns as a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity. Georgia's aspirations since the 2008 Bucharest Summit to join the NATO Alliance have been on hold.

In Ukraine, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its continuing support to Russian-led separatists in eastern Ukraine are part of Putin's strategy of destabilizing the Kyiv govern-

ment and blocking Ukraine's further integration westward. Putin has repeatedly used influence operations to hide the presence of "little green men" on Ukrainian soil, to spread disinformation about Ukrainian political leaders, and to influence financially corrupt Ukrainian oligarchs to support Russia. Putin is also using propaganda and other activities to try to break western unity in support of the United States and EU sanctions intended to pressure Russia to comply with its commitments under the Minsk agreements for ending the conflict in Ukraine. It is critically important to maintain, and potentially strengthen, these sanctions to change Russia's aggressive behavior and get to a peaceful political settlement to end the fighting in Ukraine.

In Montenegro, it appears that Russia has added political assassination as a potential weapon to block an Eastern European country from pursuing membership in NATO. Last month, the British press reported that "Russian nationalists" under the direction of Russian intelligence officials plotted to assassinate then-Prime Minister Djukanovic during Montenegro's elections in October. According to these reports, Montenegrin authorities foiled the assassination attempt just hours before the plot was to be carried out. This attempted coup d'etat represents a new and dangerous level of interference by Russia to discourage Montenegro and others from further integrating with the West.

As some of my colleagues have read in the February 14th New York Times article, Russia has fielded a missile system that violates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, or INF, Treaty—a ground-launched intermediate-range nuclear missile that threatens all of NATO. The INF Treaty was signed by President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987. This landmark treaty dramatically reduced Cold War nuclear tensions by eliminating an entire class of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles that could have struck Moscow or Berlin in less than 10 minutes.

Now Russia has moved nuclear-capable, short-range, ground-launched Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave between Poland and Lithuania. The Iskander missile's range threatens German borders—something not seen since the 1980s. The Iskander deployment runs counter to a detente that has been in place since 1989, when President Bush reduced U.S. conventional forces in Europe—and Russia did the same—in order to relieve destabilizing tension in the region and lessen the risk of escalation or miscalculation. Furthermore, Russian aggression goes beyond the violations of the INF Treaty and the Iskander missile.

During the 2014 invasion of Crimea, Russia practiced snap nuclear exercises to test the readiness of its Armed Forces to send a signal that there was

a nuclear backstop to the invasion. More disturbingly, by invading Ukraine, Russia violated the Budapest Memorandum, a multilateral commitment in which Ukraine and three other former Soviet states pledged to transfer to Russia the nuclear weapons they retained after the collapse of the Soviet Union in return for Russian recognition of their sovereignty.

Besides unilaterally reneging on its Budapest commitments, in 2014 Russia has pulled out of the DOD and DOE—Department of Defense and Department of Energy—Cooperative Threat Reduction Programs, which secured nuclear materials at storage sites and national borders. Russia has some of the largest stockpiles of nuclear materials in the world that are vulnerable to insider threats. In 2016, Russia suspended its participation in the agreement with the United States to convert 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium for use as fuel for reactors.

Since the very beginning of the Cold War, nonproliferation and arms control agreements between Russia and the United States have always received a high priority from both countries, regardless of how relations in other areas went up or down. Russia's recent actions call into question whether this can continue.

Russian actions in Syria pose a further challenge to stability in the Middle East and the broader international community. Russia's military operations to prop up the murderous Assad regime belies Moscow's claim that it intervened to fight violent extremists, including ISIS and al-Qaida. Russia has provided significant political, economic, and military support to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, even as he has slaughtered tens of thousands of Syrian civilians and used chemical weapons against his own people. Russia has repeatedly exercised its veto power in the U.N. Security Council on behalf of the Syrian regime in defiance of international standards and U.S.-led peace efforts, and, just last month, Russia vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution seeking to punish Syria for using chemical weapons.

For all of these reasons, we must recognize that Russia's alarming interference in our election is only one aspect of a much broader and dangerous threat to our core national security interests. Russia's malign behavior needs to be investigated fully and in a manner that is free of political considerations. We need answers to key questions, including:

What are Russia's overall strategic security goals, and how do Russian influence activities in Europe and the United States advance those goals?

What are the tools of Russia's influence? How has Russia used, or continues to use, those tools in influencing campaigns in Europe? How do Russian activities in Europe compare to what was evident in the U.S. Presidential elections last year?

How has Russia used influence activities in concert with other unconven-

tional warfare tactics and operational activities—for example, to support proxy forces in Ukraine and elsewhere?

What is the threat these Russian influence activities pose to U.S. democratic institutions? To NATO? To the European Union? To the post-Cold War liberal order and value system?

What are the weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the United States and European countries that Russia is successfully exploiting and magnifying?

Finally, how can the U.S. Government counter and deter Russia's influence activities, and what capabilities, structures, and other resources are needed for these purposes?

An investigation of these questions would best be conducted by an independent, transparent, outside body appointed in a bipartisan manner. However, if Congress cannot reach consensus to make that happen, then, as a ranking member on the Senate Armed Services Committee, I intend to work with the chairman to undertake the necessary effort within the committee and across the Senate. I believe we can work in a bipartisan fashion on this critical threat to our national security. I look forward to shedding light on this issue and examining what we need to do as a country to defend ourselves against and deter Russian malign influence.

As a final point, we are focused, of course, on what happened in 2016—and it is a topic of daily discussions and newspaper articles—but one of the most sobering factors is that we have an election in process right now for 2018. If it demonstrates the same interference, Russia could have an effect on that election. Indeed, there are indications that they are actually probing State election systems—the names of voters, how the States calculate and vote. Nothing has been established that would suggest they attempted to influence that activity, but the simple probing suggests that we have much to do to protect ourselves going forward—indeed, as much as looking back and finding out what went on in the 2016 election.

For these reasons, and many more, we have to work together, as I suggested and encouraged, in a bipartisan way to get at the answers—not just to look backward but to protect ourselves going forward.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUNT). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TERROR ATTACK IN LONDON

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, before I begin my remarks on the Supreme Court nomination, I want to just say a word about the terrorist attack in London yesterday.

I was devastated to hear that two Utahans, Kurt and Melissa Cochran, were victims in yesterday's attack. While Melissa is recovering, I was heartbroken to hear that Kurt has since passed away from his injuries.

I just want to offer our most sincere condolences to the Cochrans and ensure that we help them in any way we can.

I know all our prayers are with the victims and with their families, friends, and loved ones.

NOMINATION OF NEIL GORSUCH

Mr. President, it is with great disappointment that I rise to address the treatment of Judge Neil Gorsuch by my colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

Today marks the close of his confirmation hearing, which began on Monday. This hearing was extraordinarily thorough, examining just about every facet of his record and his life.

The nominee himself delivered an outstanding performance, enduring more than 20 hours of intense questioning over 2 very long days. He displayed an impressive command of the law and the kind of intelligence one expects of someone with such stellar credentials. He showed the proper understanding of the role of a judge in our constitutional system of self-government: to apply, not make, the law. He demonstrated this crucial quality both in his affirmative answers and in the times he had appropriately refused to prejudge issues that might come before him. Throughout, his demeanor was serious, thoughtful, and humble. These qualities have defined his service as a judge for the last decade and will serve him well on the U.S. Supreme Court.

As for my fellow Senators, many of them approached this hearing the right way, posing questions that gave us real insight into the nominee's record and judicial philosophy. Thanks to their hard work, Judge Gorsuch has now been vetted as extensively as any nominee to come before the Senate in the whole length of my service here. I thank them for their careful work and good judgment.

In particular, I want to single out my friend and colleague Senator GRASSLEY. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, he was charged with the monumental task of planning and executing the whole endeavor. He performed admirably, and we all owe him our sincere gratitude. He is one of the best people here, and he is totally honest and decent.

Regretfully, I feel compelled to contrast that responsible approach of many of my colleagues with the actions of a number on the other side of the aisle. Frankly, some of the treatment of Judge Gorsuch has made me ill. In him, we have a man who is superbly qualified and who quite obviously understands how his job is to say what the law is, not what he wishes it might be. In fact, I do not believe any fair examination of the whole of his

record on the bench can reasonably yield any meaningful clues as to what his policy views are. He is the kind of nominee whom, in an ideal world, we should be able to confirm by universal acclamation. Yet that is not the sort of treatment we are seeing—far from it.

Instead, we see a desperate campaign being waged against him to derail his nomination at all costs. This is the sort of approach that has long been advocated for by many far-left activists intent on attacking in their belligerent ways and stacking the courts with ideologues committed to imposing liberal policies without respect for what the law and the Constitution actually command.

As someone with great respect for all of my colleagues—even those with whom I often disagree—I had hoped they would resist the siren song of their activist base and give Judge Gorsuch a fair shake. Unfortunately, I see many of them falling prey to the temptations of this scorched-earth approach. Whatever their motivation—be it the outcome of the Garland nomination, the apparent unwillingness to accept the results of the election, or the desire for judges to push their political agenda—many of them appear willing to employ tactics they used to recognize, rightly, as inappropriate and even dangerous. In doing so, they threaten to inflict lasting damage on the judiciary, the Senate, and our politics more broadly.

Consider their demand that Judge Gorsuch answer politically charged hypotheticals about potential future cases. For decades, nominees of both parties have refused to comply, so much so that the practice is then referred to as the “Ginsburg standard,” after current Justice Ginsburg, and they had been quite right to do so. To offer an advisory opinion that is inconsistent with the Constitution’s allocation of powers—which give judges the authority to decide only actual cases and controversies, not offer broad advisory opinions—is inconsistent with the core characteristic of the judicial process, which considers issues in the particular legal and factual context of an individual case and gives parties the opportunity to make their arguments in full, and it asks judges to prejudice themselves when they should be arbiters, raising serious due process concerns for future litigants who deserve a fair hearing.

Having participated in 14 confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominees, I fully understand the temptation to ask these kinds of questions. Indeed, I have seen many Senators of both parties fall prey to the temptation, only to have a nominee politely respond about how it would be inappropriate to answer.

It is one thing to make the occasional mistake of this variety and move on. I have seen it happen countless times, but that is not what happened this week. Instead, I witnessed many of my colleagues devote almost

their entire half hour rounds to posing these sorts of inappropriate questions. When Judge Gorsuch responded appropriately and explained his inability to answer—oftentimes with an extensive explanation of the rationale for doing so—he was lambasted by some of my colleagues for his refusal to engage in this dangerous practice.

Worse yet, these harsh attacks came from Senators who I have seen gladly embrace the very same answer from nominees in the past. What they once demanded, they now reject. What they once avoided, they now embrace. Simply put, it is hard not to interpret their attacks as hypocrisy of the highest order.

This is a completely illegitimate line of attack on Judge Gorsuch, and it should be repudiated forcefully.

Consider also the way in which some of my colleagues misrepresented Judge Gorsuch’s record. It involved just a few simple steps. First, cherry-pick one of the judge’s opinions in which a sympathetic victim lost; next, gloss over the legal issues at hand that mandated the outcome Judge Gorsuch reached; then, fail to mention how he was often joined in these opinions by his colleagues appointed by Presidents Clinton and Obama; after that, fail to mention the many times Judge Gorsuch ruled in favor of litigants similar to the one who lost in the case at hand; finally, make a wild assertion and accusation about how that case shows how Judge Gorsuch is biased against “the little guy.”

We should call these phony attacks for what they are: bogus attempts to mischaracterize his record intentionally.

Any fair analysis of the record Judge Gorsuch has established on the bench can lead to only one conclusion: He is the type of judge who will reach the result commanded by the best reading of the law, free from any political agenda.

He follows his oath to do justice without respect to persons. As Judge Gorsuch himself rightfully put it, quoting Justice Scalia, “If you’re going to be a good and faithful judge, you have to resign yourself to the fact that you’re not always going to like the conclusions you reach. If you like them all the time, you’re probably doing something wrong.”

There will always be times when the law produces a result we disagree with. That is a simple fact of life. Sometimes that is our fault for not writing the law better, but the appropriate response is to change the law, not to demand that a judge ignore the law to reach a result we like.

As legislators, it is, by definition, our responsibility to change the law to produce better, more just results. If my colleagues think a law like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act is producing bad results, it is their right to try to change it. They can count on me fighting tooth and nail to protect religious liberty, but at least they will be doing their job as lawmakers, not

shirking it and demanding that unelected judges do their dirty work, nor impugning the honor of good judges like Judge Gorsuch who refuse to ignore the law on behalf of a political agenda.

In Judge Gorsuch, we have a Supreme Court nominee as fine as I could ever imagine. He is the type of man we all should be clamoring to step into the late Justice Scalia’s big shoes. But instead of the best traditions of the advice and consent process that many of us have tried to live up to, what is he treated to? Hypocritical attacks on the very judicial independence that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle claim to prize above all else, misleading attacks that distort his record, and now a promise to filibuster his nomination by the minority leader. My gosh, what have we come to around here?

I remember when Justice Ginsburg went through with only three votes against her and not much debate, and she refused to answer any of the questions that my friends on the other side were demanding of Judge Gorsuch and of other Republican judges. Frankly, I stuck up for her and felt that that was the right thing for her. I have great respect for her because of the way she handled those proceedings and others as well. We didn’t do this in earlier years. It has become so radical around here and so political around here that we are besmirching the very people who have become the judges in this land and are doing such a good job.

This is a travesty of the highest order. Judge Gorsuch is a brilliant, decent man who has devoted his life to serving his country. He has done exactly what we want as a careful judge for more than a decade. What does he get when nominated to the highest Court in the land? He gets his name dragged through the mud. He gets baited with questions we all know he cannot answer, that nobody can answer. If they are not trick questions, they are certainly improper, and then he is attacked for not answering. He gets his record mischaracterized and is accused of cruelty and hardness of heart. He gets the kind of treatment that leads him to regret putting his family through what ought to be a dignified process.

It is time to stop this madness, stop the dishonest attacks. Instead, let’s have a debate worthy of the world’s greatest deliberative body and confirm this absolutely outstanding nominee.

If my friends on the other side would treat somebody as respectable and highly prized and praised as Judge Gorsuch and treat them the way he was treated in some instances in these hearings, may we bar the door on the next nominee of this administration. That will be Armageddon, I guess, and we can’t let this body descend into that sort of catastrophe.

I will insist on our nominees being people of the highest order, like Judge Gorsuch, people who will make us all

proud, people who will respect both sides but who will enforce the law, and people who, when it becomes time to change the law, can properly make that decision and have the guts to do it. There aren't many cases that have to be changed, however. All I can say is there are some that both sides wish would be changed, and on both sides.

All I can say is this: I hope our colleagues will treat this President's nominees with greater respect. I have always tried to treat their nominees with great respect, and I helped get them through. Justice Ginsburg had only three votes against her, if I recall correctly. It was very few votes. There are judges who are now on the bench who I couldn't support, but I didn't stop them from having a vote up or down. Frankly, there are judges on the Circuit Court of Appeals whom we allowed to come up and whom I personally would not have approved as a President or otherwise but who were picked properly by the Democratic President and who had enough good recommendations on their side to sit on the bench. I think that is what has made this country a great country—that we understand that there are different points of view, not just in politics, but with regard to the law itself. And all of us have to understand that and realize that when somebody's elected President, that person, whether he or she, deserves to have fair consideration of the judicial nominees.

It is no secret that President Obama put almost 50 percent of the Federal bench on the bench, and he had a lot of up-and-down votes on them. Yes, there were some notable differences and notable debates, but by and large, the President got whomever he wanted. And I have to say that in the past, Republican Presidents generally got whomever they wanted. But in the intervening number of years since *Roe v. Wade*, we have had nothing but big problems that I think have resulted in the denigration of the bench and which should never have occurred.

I hope my colleagues, all of whom I deeply admire and like, will take some of these things into consideration and treat Judge Gorsuch with the true and deliberate respect that he deserves. I hope they can bring themselves to vote for him because he is truly a wonderful man, a great father, a wonderful husband to his wife, a tremendous person from the West, a fly fisherman, a fellow whom every one of his law clerks deeply loves, and a person who, by any measure, is one of the brightest judges in the country today. I can't really think of anybody who would be brighter than he is or any better than he is.

So Donald Trump picked one of the best people, if not the best person in America, for this job, and I hope my colleagues on the other side will recognize that in spite of their dislike, and sometimes even hatred, for Donald Trump, this is important. And it is important that we start handling these matters with greater dignity, greater

fairness. When we really do disagree, fine; let's have a debate and battle on it, and let the chips fall where they may. But not all of these deserve to be in that category, and certainly Judge Gorsuch does not deserve to be in that category. He is an absolutely outstanding person.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

RUSSIA AND CALLING FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF
A SPECIAL PROSECUTOR

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, sovereign nations across the globe are brought together by different unifying forces. It can be a shared heritage, language, religion, or outside historical forces that led to borders drawn decades or centuries ago.

As a nation, we are unique. We are diverse in every sense of the word, but even in these polarizing times, we are overwhelmingly unified. We are unified by our belief in democracy, free enterprise, and economic opportunity. We are all entrusted in nurturing the ideas enshrined in our Constitution—the idea that our system of democratic government enables us to work toward a more perfect union. At a time when the promise of democracy is receding for far too many around the world, we must do everything we can to uphold our country's free and fair elections, the foundation of our democracy.

Our elections should serve as a global benchmark for the peaceful transition of power. As President Reagan said, we must be “the shining city upon the hill,” and we must lead by example. Our elections require a strong and steady commitment from our newly naturalized citizens; from families whose families fought in the Revolutionary War; from volunteers who cover 16-hour shifts to keep polling locations open; from country, city, and township clerks.

The preservation of free and fair elections requires a strong commitment from our highest elected official in the land. As Americans, we look to the President of the United States to safeguard our democracy from foreign adversaries.

When we are presented with clear and mounting evidence that the Russian Government, at the personal discretion of Russian President Vladimir Putin, orchestrated a campaign to undermine this most fundamental institution and interfere in our election, we should expect nothing less than a clear and forceful response from the White House that this kind of behavior is simply unacceptable. Unfortunately, what we have seen from President Trump and the White House so far amounts to little more than confusion, evasion, and a whole lot of smoke.

President Trump has spoken time and again about wanting to build closer ties with Russia. On the campaign trail, he frequently fawned over Putin's strength as a leader. In 2013, he asked his Twitter followers, “Do you think Putin will be going to The Miss Universe Pageant in November in Mos-

cow—if so, will he become my new best friend?”

While I don't believe that Putin attended the pageant, the nature of the Putin-Trump relationship remains an open question. It confuses me and quite frankly alarms me that President Trump speaks so fondly of a man who brutally cracks down on his political opponents and journalists at home while stirring up conflict and aggressions abroad.

Make no mistake, Vladimir Putin is no friend of the United States or of the American people. Our Nation's intelligence agencies agree with high confidence that his government orchestrated a campaign to undermine the integrity of our recent election, and Putin has sought at every turn to destabilize the international order that has kept the American people and our allies secure for decades.

Russia's interference in our election was not an isolated incident. It is part of a broader effort to undermine the NATO alliance and weaken western democracies. I heard from our French and German allies at the Munich Security Conference last month about their concerns that Russia will continue to engage in disinformation campaigns in European elections. As we aspire to be the free-market driven, democratic “city upon a hill,” Putin's government works to sow chaos globally in an effort to further consolidate power in his nationalist, self-enriching regime.

These attempts to destabilize Russia's neighbors and rivals are not limited to cyber space and computer code. These provocations involve military aircraft, ships, nuclear capable missiles, heavy artillery, drones, and efforts to redraw international borders.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I believe that the highest duty of Congress is to keep Americans safe. Russia's dangerous and unprofessional military provocations not only place American servicemembers and NATO allies at risk, they endanger civilian lives and raise the specter of escalating regional conflict.

Just last month, Russian aircraft flew within a few hundred feet of the USS Porter in international waters in a dangerous mock attack—an action the ship's captain called out as “unsafe and unprofessional.”

Last summer, while on a congressional delegation to meet with NATO allies, I heard directly from Estonian leaders about Russia's blatant disregard for their sovereignty. Russian forces kidnapped a border guard in Estonian territory and sentenced him behind closed doors to 15 years in prison, in what a top European Union official called “a clear violation of international law.”

We have seen the Russians fly reconnaissance and fighter jets in international airspace, with their transponders switched off in order to avoid detection—at one point, nearly colliding in midair with a passenger airplane. NATO has been forced to scramble jets almost 800 times—let me repeat

that: 800 times—in 2016 alone, just to respond to Russia's encroachments on NATO airspace.

As the President speaks glowingly about Putin, Mr. Putin returns the favor by deploying a dangerous new cruise missile, in clear violation of the Reagan-era Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Simultaneously, a Russian spy ship has been spotted lurking off the U.S. coast, trying to gather intelligence information near the Navy's primary east coast submarine base.

We are also seeing Russia undertake the largest military buildup in the Arctic since the end of the Cold War and at a pace faster than we ever, ever saw during the Soviet era.

Russia is reopening defunct military outposts and building new ones all across the polar region. There are 13 new Russian airfields that are scheduled to open by the end of this year. The Russian military recently staged an exercise in the Arctic region with well over 12,000 troops.

As the Russians build up their forces in the Arctic, the United States is falling behind. Our principal maritime force in the Arctic is the U.S. Coast Guard, but they have only one heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star, that is capable of keeping Arctic shipping lanes open or conducting search and rescue missions year-round. A new icebreaker to replace the Polar Star is still a few years away.

In contrast, the Russians have over 40 icebreakers in their fleet, many of them nuclear, with plans for three new icebreakers underway. At a time when we should be investing in our Arctic capabilities, the Trump administration has been considering deep cuts to the Coast Guard's budget.

Russia's expansionist activities and military probing are not occurring in a vacuum. The numerous threats and provocations that I have outlined occur as Russia continues to wage war in eastern Ukraine in the wake of their illegal annexation of Crimea, destabilizing the opportunity for the Ukrainian people to chart their own political and economic destiny. There are 10,000 people who have lost their lives in this conflict as a direct result of Russian aggression.

Last year, as I traveled with my Senate colleagues to Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, I learned firsthand about the efforts in these countries to strengthen their civil institutions and root out corruption, build lasting partnerships, and stand up to Russian provocations. While they are doing their part, they continue to look to the United States for global leadership.

This year, U.S. troops deployed to Eastern Europe to demonstrate our ironclad commitment to our NATO allies, where they were welcomed with open arms. We are working with our partners in Iceland to enhance their capabilities to detect and respond to a recent increase in Russian submarine patrols.

I am also proud to stand with the airmen of the 127th Wing of the Michigan Air National Guard, who deployed from my State to build on their long record of successful cooperation with our partners in Latvia.

When the Kremlin is threatening our allies, buzzing our Navy warships, and meddling in foreign elections, now is not the time to call into question the commitment or the resolve of the United States of America.

Vladimir Putin's world view is shaped by his time in the KGB during the Cold War. He is committed to projecting Russian strength, both at home and abroad, through intimidation and aggression. Strength is what he respects. If Putin's provocations are not met with a strong response, they will continue and likely escalate, putting American interests and the American people at risk.

Top officials in the Trump administration have been dispatched to crisscross Europe and reassure the world of our commitments to global security. I joined Vice President PENCE and Secretary Mattis in Germany last month for the annual Munich Security Conference.

They spoke of America's commitment to NATO and the international order, which was built from the ashes of World War II, in an apparent attempt to reassure our nervous allies, but our allies are not trying to understand the aims of the Mattis administration or the Pence administration. They are trying to determine if President Trump will stand behind NATO and the institutions that have served as a counterweight to Russian aggression for decades.

The American people are also watching the White House, and they deserve to know that those who serve at the highest levels of government will always have America's best interests at heart. But every week we are faced with mounting evidence that the Trump administration and the Trump campaign have ties to Russia and are working to cover up their interactions with Russian officials.

Earlier this week, in testimony before the House Intelligence Committee, FBI Director Comey announced that the FBI was "investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian Government and whether there was any coordination between the campaign and Russia's efforts." This bears repeating. The FBI Director has confirmed that there is an active investigation into coordination between a Presidential campaign and a foreign adversary. This is just the latest development in a long string of disturbing revelations about President Trump's associates.

Ousted campaign chairman Paul Manafort has a deep web of business and political connections to Russian interests. Other campaign advisers have backed off previous claims that they never spoke with Russian offi-

cials. In fact, the coverup of these interactions has already resulted in the first resignation from the Trump administration.

Not long after President Obama imposed sanctions on the Russian officials and military intelligence agencies that were responsible for interfering in our election, former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn had a secret, off-the-record discussion with Russian Ambassador Kislyak, in which he discussed lifting these sanctions under the incoming Trump administration.

Top officials at the Justice Department clearly warned the White House that Mr. Flynn was vulnerable to Russian blackmail. He resigned only after it became clear that he misled the public and the Vice President about the substance of these off-the-record conversations.

But it doesn't just end there.

The Attorney General, at best, misled the Judiciary Committee during his confirmation hearings about his record of contact with Russian officials. He testified under oath that he "did not have communications with the Russians" during the campaign. When it became clear that he had actually met with the Russian Ambassador at least twice last year, including in a one-on-one meeting in the final weeks of the campaign, he was forced to recuse himself from the Justice Department's criminal investigation into this very, very serious issue.

It has been my experience that, when people are caught covering up their meetings and contacts with someone, they usually have something to hide. If you have nothing to hide, there is no reason for a coverup.

The serious national security implications of the Trump administration's potential ties with Russia cannot be overstated. This is a time when we need to make clear that Russian aggression will not stand. Instead, the President has attempted to distract the public through unsubstantiated allegations about the wiretapping of Trump Tower—an allegation that has been refuted by FBI Director Comey and others. President Trump continues to double down by calling into question the motives of those who want assurances about integrity in our elections.

Let me be clear. This is not about partisan politics. When there is so much smoke, there is probably some fire somewhere. If another country is infiltrating our government and political institutions or if Vladimir Putin has favors to cash in from officials at the highest levels of government, that is a serious problem.

Russia has endangered our service-members, threatened our allies, illegally annexed Crimea, engaged in war crimes in their bombing of Aleppo, and actively worked to undermine our democracy. These revelations are only adding more smoke to the Russia fire, and it is clear we need a special prosecutor to investigate.

The American people expect this investigation to be free from any political interference or influence or bias. We need someone to cut through the smoke and clear the air. An independent special prosecutor should be appointed to examine Russia's campaign to interfere in our election as well as any association or coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia.

I also believe that the time has come to create an independent, nonpartisan commission to fully investigate Russian interference. Earlier today, I cosponsored legislation introduced by Senator CARDIN that would create such a commission and provide it with the necessary subpoena power to get the answers that the American people clearly deserve.

This is not about Democrats or Republicans or about relitigating the 2016 election. This is about our national security. This commission, modeled after the 9/11 Commission, would provide a comprehensive report on what occurred last year and make recommendations as to how we can best defend the integrity of future elections.

This is about how we move forward together. This is about how we maintain the independence of our government from foreign influence and instill faith in Americans that the White House is truly working for them.

This is about moving past months of coverups and finally extinguishing this smoldering Russian fire or proving that all of this smoke is, truly, just a series of misunderstandings.

This issue shakes the foundations of our democracy, but our Union has survived harder challenges than this.

At a time when the public's trust in government is called into question, we must do everything we can to restore faith in the integrity and the impartiality of our institutions.

Just as we, as Americans, are unified in our faith in democracy and economic opportunity, we are unified in our belief in the rule of law. Just as we must show strength abroad through our military and our alliances, we must show strength at home by rooting out corruption and protecting our democratic process.

All of us—Democrats and Republicans, Congress and the White House, our diplomats and our military—must send a clear, unified message to authoritarian leaders in Moscow and everywhere else that threats levied against the United States will never be tolerated and that there will be a price to pay for making them.

The American people expect us to keep them safe while strengthening our Republic against enemies, both foreign and domestic. It is our duty to prove that we are up to the job.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO IVORY GERHARDT CYRUS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, as my colleagues know, I have been coming to the floor week after week to recognize an Alaskan who has made a difference in his or her community. As I have said repeatedly—I am a little biased, of course—I have the honor of living in the most beautiful State in the country, but it is our people who truly make it special. They are resilient, kind, and giving. And it is the next generation that is going to continue to make my State the best place in the world to live.

This week I would like to introduce my colleagues to 18-year-old Ivory Gerhardt Cyrus, this week's Alaskan of the Week. Ivory lives in Kiana, a beautiful, close-knit Inupiat village of less than 400 people on the banks of the Kobuk River in Northwest Alaska. Like many villages in Alaska, there are no roads in and out. People travel to Kotzebue, which is the closest hub city—it is not very much of a city but a big village—about 40 miles away by plane or snow machine, boat, or sometimes dog team. That is where Ivory was raised—in Kiana—and where, against many odds, she has strived.

Ivory was born with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which made getting through school a challenge. She was at times misunderstood, at times bullied, and many didn't know how to deal with her properly.

About 120 kids each year are diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in Alaska. When she was in middle school, Ivory began committing herself to helping them by speaking out about her own experiences and by advocating the way students with behavioral issues are treated in school. She was an advocate for them.

Now she is an honor roll high school senior, graduating this spring, and along the way, she has become a State of Alaska trainer for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. She gave a presentation at an international conference recently on disability and diversity, and she was named one of five recipients of the 27th annual Women of Achievement and Youth Awards in Alaska.

This is what I find most impressive about Ivory: She is passing a message of hope and service on to her peers. She started a group, encouraging the members of the group to do one positive thing each day. The name of the group is appropriately entitled "One Positive Thing," or "OPT." That message has spread throughout her community, and now villages in Kiana are remembering to do one positive thing each day for themselves, their families, and their community. Last year, she held her first OPT conference in Kiana for youth all across the region. This year, that conference—the next OPT conference, One Positive Thing—will be held on April 7 and 8.

Ivory is an exceptional young woman. She is going to go on to do exceptional things. Next fall, she plans on attending the University of Alaska Anchorage where she plans to continue to do one positive thing each day and will bring that positive attitude to the students at UAA. She is going to continue to encourage others to do that as well.

I congratulate her for all of her accomplishments, for being our Alaskan of the Week, and congratulations to her parents, Jean and Tom, for the wonderful job they have done in raising this exceptional young lady.

Ivory gives us all hope for the future.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNITED STATES-COSTA RICA BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the productive partnership between the United States and Costa Rica. I recently had the chance to meet with President Guillermo Solís, and I can attest that this is a bilateral relationship strengthened by Costa Rica's unwavering support for democracy and human rights, comprehensive economic relations, and a deep-rooted commitment to security and the environment. Since 1851, the United States has enjoyed formal diplomatic relations with Costa Rica, one of Latin America's most enduring democracies, and the close cooperation between our two countries is an example of how international engagement consistently advances U.S. national interests and national security.

In recent years, Costa Rica has become one of the United States' most strategic security partners in Central America. In 2016, in response to the challenges of increasing cocaine trafficking in the region, President Solís's administration developed a security strategy that sets aggressive goals to expand its capacity to control Costa Rica's sovereign airspace and maritime territory. Last year, Costa Rica seized more than 24,000 kilos of cocaine that were ultimately bound to the United